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C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 001105

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: ARZUMANIAN DETENTION EXTENDED TO TWO MORE MONTHS

REF: A) YEREVAN 608 B) YEREVAN 935

Classified By: DCM Joseph Pennington, reasons 1.4 (b.d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Former FM Aleksander Arzumanian's AmCit wife, called on CDA August 31 to brief him on the status of the case. Arzumanian remains in the National Security Service (NSS) lock-up, under investigation for money-laundering. Coincidentally, on the same day, the courts approved an additional two-months of pre-trial detention, to extend the period otherwise set to expire September 7. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Former Foreign Minister Aleksander Arzumanian has been under arrest and held in the NSS jail since May 7, (see Ref A), after authorities accused him of illegally receiving large sums of money from Moscow through an array of shadow intermediaries, each receiving small tranches. Press reports indicate that authorities seized \$55,400 from the Arzumanian apartment. Arzumanian's wife, (who does not actually use her husband's surname but her maiden name), confirmed for us last May that the press-reported sum was at least roughly correct, while refusing to confirm details or explain why her family would be keeping such a large sum of cash at home. She hinted that the money was intended to fund political protest activity around the May 12 elections. Arzumanian had been a minor, if provocatively outspoken, opposition figure for some years, whose doings have rarely attracted much attention prior to his arrest.

¶3. (C) Arzumanian's wife updated us on her husband's condition. She said he was in good health, and apparently reasonably good spirits, though she suspected the latter was a front that he maintained for the benefit of his family. Family members (wife, mother, and sister) are generally allowed one visit every two weeks, all at the same time, for an hour. This is not automatic, however; application must be made every time, and the NSS occasionally denies permission for no clear reason. Arzumanian separately gets more frequent access to his lawyer and to human rights monitors. The family is also able to deliver a week's worth of food once each week, which NSS guards keep for Arzumanian in a refrigerator near his cell. Arzumanian customarily shares a small cell with a cellmate. His wife has not seen it personally, but has a description from a former cellmate, who has since been released. The cell is reportedly roughly six feet by ten feet for two persons. Arzumanian has access to reading material to help pass the time. The prisoners leave their cells only for short exercise periods each day, and in the event of authorized visitors.

¶4. (C) Arzumanian's wife was growing pessimistic about her husband's chances of being released prior to February 2008 presidential elections. She affirmed that the family's lawyers would appeal the August 31 court ruling extending Arzumanian's pre-trial detention, but had little hope of success. With frustration, she commented that all she and

her husband wanted was either to have a trial as soon as possible so that all the facts could be made public, or failing that, to have her husband released on bail while awaiting trial. CDA affirmed that he himself had pressed senior GOAM leaders to make the point that Arzumanian was due a fair and prompt trial, and he undertook to raise the issue again at his next senior-level GOAM meeting.

15. (C) COMMENT: We have remained in regular contact with Arzumanian,s wife since May, though this was her first substantive conversation with our new CDA. President Kocharian promised CDA (ref B) July 20 that he would have Arzumanian released on bail if the investigation dragged on for too long. The time has come for us to re-engage with authorities on this issue, and we will do so.
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